DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 419 632 PS 026 601

AUTHOR	Nord, Christine Winquist
TITLE	Father Involvement in Schools. ERIC Digest.
INSTITUTION	ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education, Champaign, IL.
SPONS AGENCY	Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.
REPORT NO	EDO-PS-98-3
PUB DATE	1998-06-00
NOTE	3p.
CONTRACT	RR93002007
PUB TYPE	ERIC Publications (071) -- ERIC Digests in Full Text (073) -- Reports - Research (143)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Academic Achievement; Elementary Secondary Education; Family Environment; Father Attitudes; *Fathers; Nuclear Family; One Parent Family; *Parent Participation; Parent Role; *Parent School Relationship; *Parent Student Relationship; Performance Factors
IDENTIFIERS	ERIC Digests; *National Household Education Survey

ABSTRACT

Until recently, fathers were the hidden parents in research on children's well-being. Research stimulated by the new interest in fathers suggests that fathers' involvement in their children's schools does make a difference in their children's education. Using data from the 1996 National Household Education Survey (NHES:96), this Digest looks at the extent of father involvement in two-parent and in single-parent families, explores the types of involvement, and discusses the link between fathers' involvement and kindergartners' through 12th-graders' school performance. Findings noted include the following: (1) fathers in two-parent families are less likely than mothers in two-parent families to be highly involved in their children's schools; (2) fathers and mothers who head single-parent families are virtually identical in their level of involvement, and it is quite similar to that of mothers in two-parent families; (3) fathers in two-parent families are more likely to attend school or class events or general school meetings than they are to attend parent-teacher conferences or to volunteer at their children's schools. Findings also indicated that in two-parent households, children are more likely to do well academically, to participate in extracurricular activities, and to enjoy school. Children are less likely to have ever repeated a grade or to have been suspended or expelled if their fathers have high involvement in their schools. This finding was also true in father-only households, allowing that children living in single-parent households are, on average, less successful in school and experience more behavior problems than children living in two-parent households. The Digest concludes by noting that the low participation of fathers in two-parent families offers schools an opportunity to increase overall parental involvement by targeting fathers, and that fathers can be a positive force in their children's education. (LPP)

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION
CENTER (ERIC)
X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education

University of Illinois • 51 Gerty Drive • Champaign, IL 61820-7469
(217) 333-1386 • (800) 583-4135 (Voice/TTY) • ericeece@uiuc.edu

ERIC DIGEST
June 1998 • EDO-PS-98-3

ED 419 632

Father Involvement in Schools

Christine Winquist Nord

Until recently, fathers were the hidden parent in research on children's well-being. Their importance to children's financial well-being was widely accepted, but their contribution to other aspects of children's development was often assumed to be secondary to that of mothers and was not usually examined. Reflecting this bias in research on child development, many federal agencies, and programs dealing with family issues, focused almost exclusively on mothers and their children. In 1995, President Clinton issued a memorandum requesting that all executive departments and agencies make a concerted effort to include fathers in their programs, policies, and research programs where appropriate and feasible (Clinton, 1995). Research stimulated by the new interest in fathers suggests that fathers' involvement in their children's schools does make a difference in their children's education (Nord, Brimhall, & West, 1997).

This Digest looks at the extent to which fathers are involved in their children's schools and the link between fathers' involvement and kindergartners' through 12th-graders' school performance, using data from the 1996 National Household Education Survey (NHES:96).

1996 National Household Education Survey

The NHES:96 was sponsored by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). The involvement of fathers in two-parent and in father-only families is presented and contrasted with that of mothers in two-parent and in mother-only families. Information related to the link between father involvement and student achievement is presented for children living in two-parent and in father-only households. (The analyses are restricted to children living with biological, step, or adoptive fathers. Children living with foster fathers are excluded.)

The NHES:96 asked about four types of school activities that parents could participate in during the school year: attending a general school meeting, attending a regularly scheduled parent-teacher conference, attending a school or class event, and serving as a volunteer at the school. Parents are said to have low involvement in their children's schools if they have participated in none or only one of the four activities during the current school year. They are categorized as having moderate involvement if they have participated in at least two of the available activities. Those who have participated in three or four of the activities are said to be highly involved in their children's schools. (Not all schools offer parents the opportunity to be involved in each of these activities. Low involvement may be due to failure to take advantage of available opportunities for involvement or because schools do not offer parents opportunities for involvement.)

The Extent of Father Involvement

Two-Parent Families

The proportion of children living in two-parent families with highly involved fathers is about half of the proportion with highly involved mothers—27% and 56%, respectively. In other words, in two-parent families, children are twice as likely to have mothers who are highly involved than to have fathers who are highly involved in their children's schools. Nearly half of children in two-parent families have fathers who participated in none or only one of the four activities since the beginning of the school year. In contrast, only 21% of children living in two-parent families have mothers with such low participation in their schools.

Single-Parent Families

Children living with single fathers or with single mothers are about equally likely to have parents who are highly involved in their schools—46% and 49%, respectively. Both fathers and mothers who head single-parent families have levels of involvement in their children's schools that are quite similar to mothers in two-parent families and are much higher than fathers in two-parent families.

Types of Involvement

In two-parent families, there are two activities for which fathers' involvement approaches that of mothers: attendance at school or class events (such as a play, science fair, or sports event) and attendance at general school meetings. Fathers may find it easier to attend these types of activities because they are more likely than the other two to occur during nonschool and nonwork hours. Fathers in father-only families are more likely than fathers in two-parent families to participate in these and other activities, so work constraints are not the sole explanation for low involvement among fathers in two-parent families.

Father Involvement and Student Achievement

Policymakers and educators agree that family involvement in children's education is closely linked to children's school success (U.S. Department of Education, 1994; Henderson & Berla, 1994). Many policymakers, school officials, and families, however, often assume that family involvement means that mothers' involvement in schools is important. This assumption has some basis in fact in that mothers are more likely than fathers to be highly involved in their children's schools, and the extent of their involvement is strongly related to children's school performance and adjustment (Nord, Brimhall, & West, 1997). However, an important question is, does fathers' involvement matter, as well?

PS 026601

Father Participation in Two-Parent Families

Half of students get mostly A's and enjoy school, according to their parents, when their fathers are highly involved in their schools compared to about one-third of students when their fathers have low levels of involvement. Students are also half as likely to have ever repeated a grade (7% vs. 15%) and are significantly less likely to have ever been suspended or expelled (10% vs. 18%) if their fathers have high as opposed to low involvement in their schools.

After taking into account such factors as mothers' involvement, fathers' and mothers' education, household income, and children's race/ethnicity, it was found that children are still more likely to get A's, participate in extracurricular activities, enjoy school, and are less likely to have ever repeated a grade if their fathers are involved in their schools compared to if they are not (Nord, Brimhall, & West, 1997).

After taking into account these other factors, it was found that mothers' involvement, but not fathers' involvement, is associated with a reduced likelihood of 6th- through 12th-graders having ever been suspended or expelled.

Father-Only Households

Children living in single-parent households are, on average, less successful in school and experience more behavior problems than children living in two-parent households (McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994). Most research on single-parenthood focuses on children living with single mothers. However, children living in father-only households also do less well in school than children living in two-parent households.

Results also reveal that children in father-only households do better in school, are more likely to participate in extracurricular activities, enjoy school more, and are less likely to have ever been suspended or expelled if their fathers are highly involved in their schools compared to if they have only low levels of involvement. Nearly one-third of students get mostly A's when their fathers are highly involved in their schools compared to 17% when their fathers have low levels of involvement in their schools. Even more striking, only 11% of 6th- through 12th-graders have ever been suspended or expelled when their fathers have high levels of involvement in their schools compared to 34% when their fathers have low levels of involvement in their schools. Although a similar pattern is observed for grade repetition, the difference between children whose fathers have high and low levels of involvement is not statistically significant.

Even after controlling for such factors as fathers' education, family income, and children's race/ethnicity, it was found that children do better in school and are less likely to have ever been suspended or expelled if their fathers have high as opposed to low levels of involvement in their schools.

Conclusions

The observed patterns of fathers' involvement in their children's schools, linked to family structure, are consistent with existing research (Cooksey & Fondell, 1996) and with the notion that there is a division of labor in two-parent families, with mothers taking more responsibility for child-related tasks, whereas in single-parent families the lone parent assumes the responsibility. Fathers and mothers in two-parent families may be operating under the mistaken assumption that fathers do not matter as much as mothers when it comes to involvement in their children's school. The results also support research showing that single fathers and mothers are more similar in their parenting behavior than are mothers and fathers in two-parent families (Thomson, McLanahan, & Curtin, 1992).

The low participation of fathers in two-parent families offers schools an opportunity to increase overall parental involvement. By targeting fathers, schools may be able to make greater gains in parental involvement than by targeting mothers or parents, in general. This is not to say that schools should not continue to welcome mothers' involvement, but because mothers already exhibit relatively high levels of participation in their children's schools, there is less room to increase their involvement.

The involvement of fathers in their children's schools is also important for children's achievement and behavior. In two-parent households, fathers' involvement in their children's schools has a distinct and independent influence on children's achievement over and above that of mothers. These findings show that fathers can be a positive force in their children's education, and that when they do get involved, their children are likely to do better in school. Unfortunately, many fathers are relatively uninvolved in their children's schools (Nord, Brimhall, & West, 1997). These results should encourage fathers to become more involved in their children's schools and encourage schools to welcome fathers' involvement.

Adapted from: Nord, Christine Winquist. (1998, April). How involved are fathers in their children's schools? *and* Students do better when their fathers are involved at school. (*Issue Briefs NCES 98-120 & 98-121). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education.*

For More Information

Clinton, W. J. (1995, June 16). *Supporting the role of fathers in families.* Memorandum for the heads of executive departments and agencies. Washington, DC.

Cooksey, E. C., & Fondell, M. M. (1996). Spending time with his kids: Effects of family structure on fathers' and children's lives. *Journal of Marriage and the Family, 58*(3), 693-707. EJ 537 273.

Henderson, A. T., & Berla, N. (Eds.). (1994). A new generation of evidence: The family is critical to student achievement. Washington, DC: National Committee for Citizens in Education. ED 375 968.

McLanahan, S., & Sandefur, G. (1994). *Growing up with a single parent: What hurts, what helps.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. ED 375 224.

Nord, Christine Winquist, Brimhall, DeeAnn, & West, Jerry. (1997). Fathers' involvement in their children's schools (NCES 98-091). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. ED 409 125.

Thomson, E., McLanahan, S. S., & Curtin, R. B. (1992). Family structure, gender, and parental socialization. *Journal of Marriage and the Family, 54*(2), 368-378. EJ 446 994.

U.S. Department of Education. (1994). *Strong families, strong schools: Building community partnerships for learning.* Washington, DC: Author. ED 371 909.

References identified with an ED (ERIC document), EJ (ERIC journal), or PS number are cited in the ERIC database. Most documents are available in ERIC microfiche collections at more than 1,000 locations worldwide and can be ordered through EDRS: (800) 443-ERIC. Journal articles are available from the original journal, interlibrary loan services, or article reproduction clearinghouses such as UnCover (800) 787-7979, UMI (800) 732-0616, or ISI (800) 523-1850.

This publication was funded by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education, under contract no. DERR93002007. The opinions expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect the positions or policies of OERI. ERIC Digests are in the public domain and may be freely reproduced.